



Rand Park High School

Integrity and Commitment

Asgaai Avenue, Randpark Ridge • 011 793 1246 • www.randparkhigh.co.za

COUNSELLING NEWSLETTER TEEN DEPRESSION & SUICIDE

13 June 2019

Dear Parents, Guardians & Learners

Teen depression and suicide is a topic that I have not written about often, partly because one assumes that there is already a lot of awareness about it as it so often features in movies, TV shows and on social media and because it feels like the stereotypical topic a psychologist would write about. I thought, however, that it would be a good idea to touch on this topic as depression and subsequent suicidal behaviour is becoming more prevalent amongst our youth and is keeping so many of our young ones from living a fulfilled and happy life.

Unfortunately, teen depression is often not taken seriously enough for various reasons. Many teenagers tend to use the word “depressed” too often and even casually because they are unaware of the difference between actual clinical depression and just feeling sad and irritated after having a bad day. Furthermore, teen depression is often dismissed as simply “teenage hormones” or “mood swings” especially since adolescence is associated with erratic behaviour and emotional ups and downs. Some teenagers are labeled as “emo” by their peers to the extent that it becomes a fashion trend to be “depressed” and to be self-harming. Consequently, many teenagers who truly are suffering from depression are not recognised or taken seriously.

Despite various perceptions, teen depression is very real and, according to the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG), it affects 5 in every 100 teenagers and 9% of teen deaths in South Africa are due to suicide. These are alarming and disturbing figures which just keep on increasing.



Source: thewellnessfountain.com.au

Although the onset of depression can occur without necessarily being triggered by any particular event or circumstance, it often stems from feelings of sadness or unhappiness caused by a loss or a major life-changing event such as a traumatic incident, death of a loved one, divorce or the break-up of a relationship. Ongoing abuse or bullying are also common triggers as it affects the person’s sense of self-worth and leaves them feeling worthless. When these feelings of sadness and hopelessness continue for more than a few weeks and start to interfere with a person’s normal day-to-day functioning at home or at school, it usually indicates the onset of depression.

COUNSELLING NEWSLETTER

TEEN DEPRESSION & SUICIDE (continued)

Signs to look out for:

- Persistent sadness or feelings of emptiness.
- Irritability or feeling angry.
- Loss of interest in things one used to enjoy doing.
- Absenteeism from school - pretending to be sick a lot.
- Crying a lot.
- Withdrawing and spending a lot of time alone.
- Change in eating patterns (eating too much or too little).
- Change in sleeping habits (sleeping too much or experiencing insomnia).
- Lack of energy or restlessness.
- Self-mutilating behaviour and/or suicidal thoughts and feelings.

What can you as the parent do?

- ✓ Encourage your child to talk about his/her feelings.
- ✓ Constantly reassure them that you care and that you are there for them.
- ✓ DO NOT say something like “Snap out of it” or “Get over it” - they are simply unable to do so.
- ✓ Spend some quality “fun time” with your teenager even though they might be resistant at first.
- ✓ Ask your teen to be open and honest with you about their feelings and suicidal thoughts. Don’t worry about being straightforward - it’s better to know than not to know.
- ✓ If they do mention suicide - take it seriously and get them help as soon as possible.
- ✓ Remove or hide any objects that they could use to harm themselves, like knives, guns, alcohol, drugs etc.
- ✓ In severe cases, it may be necessary to have your child hospitalised for treatment.

Where to turn for help?

- A medical doctor, school psychologist or a private psychologist.
- SADAG Mental Health: (011) 234 4837.
- SADAG Toll-free suicide emergency line: 0800 567 567 / SMS 31393.
- SADAG 24hr Helpline: 0800 456 789.
- Akeso Psychiatric Response Unit 24 Hour: 0861 435 787.
- Family Life Centre (Parkwood): (011) 788-4784.
- Lifeline SA. Helpline: 0861 322 322.

It is important to remember that you cannot take responsibility for making your child well and you cannot “fix” them. But you can seek help on their behalf or encourage them to seek help for themselves. Should you become aware of any of the above-mentioned behaviours or should you suspect that your child may be suffering from depression, do not hesitate to contact the School Psychological Support Services for assistance.

Yours sincerely

LANA COETZEE (MRS)
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST

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School closes directly after the exam has been written on Friday, 14 June and re-opens on Tuesday, 9 July.

Term 3 starts with Day 4 on the timetable - learners must pack accordingly. We wish our learners and their families as well as our staff a restful holiday.